

Gonorrhea

What is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*. This bacterium can grow and multiply easily in the warm, moist areas of the reproductive tract, including the cervix, uterus, and fallopian tubes in women, and in the urethra in women and men. The bacterium can also grow in the mouth, throat, eyes, and anus.

Who is at risk for gonorrhea?

Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhea. In the United States, the highest reported rates of infection are among sexually active teenagers, young adults, and African Americans.

How is gonorrhea spread?

People get gonorrhea by having sex with someone who has the disease. Having sex means vaginal, oral, or anal sex. Ejaculation does not have to occur for gonorrhea to be transmitted. Gonorrhea can also be spread from an untreated mother to her baby during childbirth.

People who have had gonorrhea and received treatment may get infected again if they have sexual contact with a person infected with gonorrhea.

How common is gonorrhea?

Gonorrhea is a very common sexually transmitted disease. It is estimated that more than 700,000 persons in the U.S. get new gonorrhea infections each year.

What are the symptoms of gonorrhea?

In males, symptoms appear 1 to 14 days after infection, though they can take up to 30 days to appear. Symptoms include a burning when urinating, painful or swollen testicles, and a white, yellow, or green discharge from the penis. Some men with gonorrhea may have no symptoms at all.

Most women who are infected with gonorrhea have no symptoms. Even when a woman has symptoms, they are often mild and can be mistaken for a bladder or vaginal infection. The initial symptoms and signs in women include a painful or burning sensation when urinating, increased vaginal discharge, or vaginal bleeding between periods. Women with gonorrhea are at risk of developing serious complications from the infection, even if symptoms are not present or are mild.

Symptoms of rectal infection in both men and women may include discharge, anal itching, soreness, bleeding, or painful bowel movements. Rectal infection also may cause no symptoms. Infections in the throat may cause a sore throat but usually causes no symptoms.

How is gonorrhea diagnosed?

Most of the time, a urine test can be used to test for gonorrhea. A laboratory test for gonorrhea

can be done for samples taken from other infected areas.

Anyone who is sexually active should discuss his or her risk factors with a health care provider and ask whether he or she should be tested for gonorrhea or other STDs. Anyone with unusual genital symptoms should see their health care provider. Anyone with a sex partner who has recently been diagnosed with an STD should see a health care provider.

What is the treatment for gonorrhea?

Antibiotics can successfully cure gonorrhea, but the incidence of drug-resistant strains is increasing in many areas of the world, including the United States. This is making it much more difficult to successfully treat gonorrhea.

It is important to take all of the medication prescribed to cure gonorrhea. Although medication will stop the infection, it will not repair any permanent damage done by the disease. People who have had gonorrhea and have been treated can get the disease again if they have sexual contact with persons infected with gonorrhea. If a person's symptoms continue even after receiving treatment, he or she should return to a doctor to be reevaluated.

What are the complications of gonorrhea?

Untreated gonorrhea can cause serious and permanent health problems for men and women. In women, gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease, which leads to abdominal pain, fever, internal abscesses, chronic pelvic pain, and sometimes damage to the fallopian tubes. Damage to the fallopian tubes can cause infertility and may increase the risk of an ectopic pregnancy. In men, gonorrhea can cause epididymitis, a painful condition of the ducts attached to the testicles that may lead to infertility if left untreated. Gonorrhea can spread to the blood or joints. This condition can be life threatening. In addition, people with gonorrhea can more easily contract HIV.

How can gonorrhea be prevented?

The surest way to avoid transmission of STDs is to abstain from sexual intercourse or to be in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected. Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of gonorrhea. Use condoms with a water-based lubricant and use a new condom every time you have sex.

How do I get more information on gonorrhea?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/Gonorrhea/>

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Updated 5/22/12

This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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